

ACAPTAININ THE RANKS

By George Carey Eggleston

(Continued from Last Week.)

SYNOPSIS.

Captain Guilford Duncan, C. S. A., takes part in the last fight, at Appomattox, and leaves the army. He then determines to go to Cairo, Ill. Although well educated and a lawyer, Captain Duncan is without family or money, and works his passage to Cairo. Here he saves Captain Hallam's cotton from fire, and Captain Hallam, a modern "captain of industry," hires Captain Duncan, and quickly advances in his employer's estimation. He saves Captain Hallam's coal fleet from destruction by a storm, and is made a partner by Captain Hallam. The young man becomes a force of good among the young men of Cairo. Barbara Verne, a young lady, runs the boarding house in which Captain Duncan takes his meals. Captain Duncan is thanked by Barbara for saving her from annoyance by mischievous boys. He determines to call upon her.

Captain Duncan invites Barbara to a dance. He incurs the enmity of Napper Tandy, a capitalist, a rival of Captain Hallam, by making of the latter's coal mine a paying property, in competition with one of Tandy's properties. At the coal mine Duncan meets an old acquaintance, Dick Temple, now working as a miner. Dick Temple suggests a way to increase the output of the mine and is appointed engineer. XVI—Duncan, who is in love with Barbara. Napper Tandy attempts to bribe Duncan. Duncan proposes to Barbara. She tells him she cannot give him a decided answer. Napper Tandy circulates the story that Duncan has asked him for a bribe. To retaliate, Hallam proposes to buy sufficient shares in Tandy's bank to elect Duncan president. Dick Temple is commissioned by Hallam to buy the bank stock. Barbara tells Duncan she cannot marry him because she is the daughter of a thief. Temple succeeds in buying the bank stock. Barbara tells Duncan she cannot marry him because she is the daughter of a thief.

CHAPTER XXII.

THAT evening Guilford Duncan was summoned to Hallam's house for supper. With only Mrs. Hallam for auditor, Hallam wished to tell the young man all that had occurred, for Duncan had not been permitted to know aught of it, since Hallam had turned him out of his room in order that the conference with Dick Temple might be a strictly private one. Nor had Duncan seemed very greatly concerned to inquire. He had not expected Hallam and Temple to succeed in accomplishing anything, and at this time his fate was at a crisis in another and, to him, a dearer way. His interview with Barbara had been held, as we know, at the precise time when Hallam and Temple were in consultation with regard to the matter of Tandy's accusation. In some degree at least the painful character of that interview with Barbara and its unsatisfactory result had dulled his mind to the other trouble. In view of Barbara's seemingly final rejection of his wooing he was not sure that he greatly cared what might become of his reputation or his career. He was too strong a man in his moral character, however, to remain long in a state of such indifference, but for the time being he found it impossible to regard his future as a matter of much consequence now that

Barbara refused to share that future with him. "There is still one more chance," he reflected, "one more interview with Barbara, one more hope that I may win her. If that fails, the other thing won't matter much. I'll horsewhip Tandy and then go away. No; I won't go away. I won't desert in the presence of the enemy. I won't—oh, I don't know what I will or won't do! All that must wait till I know my fate with Barbara."

This was on the morning after his evening with Barbara—the morning on which Temple first made acquaintance with Tandy. Duncan was sitting idly in his office, mechanically toying with a paper cutter. Presently he overheard the inkstand, spilling its contents over some legal papers that he had drawn up the day before.

"That's fortunate," he ejaculated as with blotting pads he sought to save what he could of the documents. "It gives me something better to do than sit here idly musing. Those papers must go off by the afternoon mail, and I must rewrite them first."

He set to work at once, and close application to the task for several hours brought him into a healthier condition of mind. When he had finished the task and had taken the papers to the postoffice he realized that his state of mind had been a morbid one. He realized, too, that he must end the suspense as quickly as possible in order that he might take up work and grow sound of soul again.

Returning to his office, he sent a note to Barbara:

I shall go to see you tonight, unless you forbid. I must hear what more you have to tell me, and I must in my turn tell you something of myself. When that is done I shall renew my efforts to win you to myself. Please send me word that I may come.

For answer he got the single word "Come," written in the middle of a page, without address or signature. Thus it came about that while Temple was sitting in his hotel room in negotiation with Tandy over a matter that involved Duncan's future more vitally than any other event had ever done, Duncan himself sat with Barbara, trying to adjust another matter which seemed to him of even greater consequence.

Barbara had her emotions in leash now. Without hesitation and with a bravely controlled utterance she went at once to the marrow of the matter.

"I told you," she began, "that I am the daughter of a thief. My father was trusted absolutely by my grandfather. He betrayed the trust. He made use of his authority as a member of the banking house not only to wreck it in speculation, but also to rob all the people who had trusted their money to it. I don't understand such matters very well; but at any rate, my father ruined the firm and robbed its customers. At a single stroke he reduced his father to poverty and forever disgraced his honorable name. When he found that the facts must become known at once my father went home and blew his brains out. I was born that day, and my mother died of shock and grief within the hour. My poor grandfather lived for a month, without speaking a word to anybody; then he quit living."

"It is a terribly sad story," said Duncan. "I should not have let you tell it, poor child."

"Oh, but I was obliged to tell you," she interrupted. "It was my duty. You see—well, you have been so good to me, and I am obliged to say 'no' to what you asked me before you knew this horrible thing. It wouldn't have been fair just to say 'no' and not tell you of a thing that explains, a thing that must make you wish you hadn't asked me that."

"But it does not make me wish anything of the kind, Barbara. It makes me more eager than ever to win you

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in order that I may devote my life to the joyous task of making you forget the horror of this thing. Oh, Barbara, I never loved you half so madly as I love you now. And you love me. I know it, but you must say it. You love me, Barbara! Say it! Say it now!"

The girl hesitated for no more than a moment, while her whole body quivered.

"God help me!" she said then, "I do love you! I love you too well to let you link your life with mine, to let you take upon yourself the shadow of my disgrace."

"But you have no disgrace. You are innocent. The fault is not yours that your father betrayed his trust a score of years ago—before you were born."

The two were standing now.

"I want you to sit down while I answer you, Barbara," said Duncan, with almost unimaginable tenderness in his tone. "No, not in that straight backed chair, for I want you to listen to all I have to say and to be at ease while you listen. Sit here," pushing an easy chair forward, "sit here where you can see my face as I speak. I want you to see in my eyes the sincerity of my soul. Now I know you, Barbara, for what you are, and I love you for that alone. What your father may have done or been makes no difference to me; it in no way alters or lessens my love for you, and it never will. Knowing it all, I am more earnest than ever in my purpose to make you my wife if I can persuade you to that after I have told you something about myself that may very justly seem to you a real bar to my hopes."

"Go on, please," said the girl. "Tell me what you will, but I shall never believe anything ill of you. I know better."

"Thank you for saying that, dear," he responded, with a tremor in his tone. "But unhappily others may believe it. If they do, then the career you have expected for me must be at an end at once. My reputation for integrity will be gone for good, and I must be content to surrender all my ambitions. That is why I must tell you of this ugly thing before again asking you to be my wife."

"Go on," she said again. "But I shall believe nothing bad of you, even though an angel should tell me."

"I told you the other night," he said, "that I had quarreled with Napper Tandy, that he had tried to tempt me with a money bribe to do an infamous thing. He now gives it out that it was I who proposed the bribe; that I went to him with an offer to do that infamous thing for hire and that he indignantly rejected the offer."

"He lies!" broke in the girl. "Yes, he lies, of course," answered Duncan, "but I have no way of proving it. He and I were alone and in his house. There were no witnesses. How, then, am I ever to clear my name of so foul an accusation?"

"There is no need," answered the girl. "Nobody who knows you will ever believe the story. Captain Hallam would not think it worth asking a question about."

"No; Captain Hallam would not for a moment think of such a thing as even possible. But that is because he knows me as few other men do or ever will. But the accusation troubles him, because he knows that other people will believe it. He and Richard Temple are at this moment busy trying to find some way of clearing my name of the foul slander. They will do all that two loyal and sagacious friends can do to accomplish that purpose. But I cannot imagine any way in which they can succeed."

"What is it they are doing?" "I do not know. They have refused to tell me. I only know that they can never succeed."

"Oh, you must not think that. You don't know what wonders Captain Hal-

lams can do. You must have hope and confidence. Besides, nobody who knows you will ever believe such a story as that. Your own life will contradict the lie, and Tandy's reputation is not of a kind to lend sensible people to believe his falsehood when you have set the truth against it. You are depressed and despondent now. The mood is unworthy of you."

"Tell me what I should do."

"First of all you should act like the brave, strong man that you are. You should either take this slander by the throat and strangle it by publishing a simple, direct statement of the facts, or you should ignore it altogether as a thing too absurd to need even a denial. Wait till you see what Captain Hallam and Mr. Temple succeed in doing and then act as seems best. But, in any case, you must be strong and courageous. No other mood belongs to such a man as you."

Duncan looked her full in the face for a space before speaking. Then he said:

"And yet you say you have no gift to help me—that if you were my wife you would be a drag upon me! Oh, Barbara, you cannot know how greatly I need the strength that the sympathy and counsel of such a woman as you are must give to the man who loves and wins her. You have in this hour rescued me from despondency; you have made me strong again; you have shown me my duty and inspired me with resolution to do it manfully."

"I am very glad," she answered.

"Then promise me you will stand by my side always. Let me give you the right to help. Say that you will be my wife!"

His voice was full of tender pleading, and for a moment the girl hesitated. Finally she said:

"I think I know how to answer now, but you mustn't interrupt. I feel as though I couldn't stand much this evening."

"I will not interrupt. I am too eager to hear."

"I think I have a plan for you and me. I still think what I thought before when I said 'no.' I still think you ought to marry a woman that you need never be ashamed to introduce as your wife. If I were sure of my capacity to make you happy, not just for a little while, but throughout all your life, I would say 'yes' to the questions you have asked. But I mustn't make any mistake that might spoil your life, and so I must not say 'yes' just now, at least, and you will not let me say 'no.' I am still very young, as you know. You, too, are very young enough to wait. So I think we'll leave both the 'yes' and the 'no' unsaid for a long time to come—for a year, perhaps—long enough, at any rate, for both of us to find out which of us is right. During that time we must be the very best of friends. You must tell me everything that concerns you, so that I may practice helping you and find out whether I can really do it or not. If you find that I can't you shall be perfectly free to go away from me. If I find that I can't, then I'll say 'no' and stick to it."

Duncan was disposed to plead for better terms, but the little lady had fully made up her mind and would accept no modification of the treaty.

As they were on the point of parting, Barbara, with something like a struggle, made an addition to the compact.

"If that slander sticks to you, Guilford, I'll marry you at once and give it the lie."

(To be continued.)

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